

Consequences of Lutheranism: James and Rorty on the Sacred¹

Consequências do Luteranismo: James e Rorty sobre o Sagrado

Claudio Marcelo Viale

Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones
Científicas y Tecnológicas (CONICET)

Instituto de Humanidades (IDH)

Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades (FFyH)

Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (UNC) - Argentina

cmviale@gmail.com

Abstract: The primary object of this article is to analyze how William James and Richard Rorty conceive the sacred. The latter explicitly follows in his philosophy of religion a Jamesian path, which stresses the importance of privatizing religion. I will put forward two arguments against this interpretation: first, that James's notion of self-surrender is incompatible with the Rortyan idea of privatization; second, that this notion of self-surrender has Lutheran roots in James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

Keywords: Classical Pragmatism. Religion. William James. Richard Rorty. Self-surrender.

Resumo: O objeto principal deste artigo é analisar como William James e Richard Rorty concebem o sagrado. O último segue explicitamente, em sua filosofia da religião, um caminho Jamesiano que salienta a importância da privatização da religião. Apresentarei dois argumentos contra essa interpretação: primeiro, que a noção jamesiana de auto-rendição é incompatível com a ideia rortyana de privatização; segundo, que esta noção de auto-rendição possui raízes luteranas em *Variedades da Experiência Religiosa*, de James.

Palavras-chave: Pragmatismo Clássico. Religião. William James. Richard Rorty. Auto-rendição.

1 Language revision: Rita Karina Plasencia. I have discussed a previous draft of this paper both in my research group <http://grupocyp.comuv.com/> and in the International Symposium Richard Rorty held in Buenos Aires in May 2013. I fully appreciate criticisms and suggestions in both instances. I would also like to thank anonymous reviewers' suggestions and criticisms to a previous version of this article.

It shows the depth of Mr. James's religious insight that he first and last and always made moralism the target of his hottest attack, and pitted religion and it against each other as enemies, of whom one must die utterly, if the other is to live in genuine form. The accord of moralism and religion is superficial, their discord radical (James (1982 [1884]): 62-3).

[in preparing the *Varieties*], the problem I have set myself is a hard one:... second, to make the hearer or reader believe, what I myself invincibly do believe, that, although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is mankind's most important function. A task well-nigh impossible, I fear, and in which I shall fail; but to attempt it is *my* religious act (JAMES, 1967 [1901]: 741)

Introduction

William James and Richard Rorty are two of the fundamental figures of pragmatism. The former was a leading representative of the classical movement, writing on various philosophical fields and on psychological issues as well. The latter was one of the main driving forces behind the revival of pragmatism or neopragmatism. As it is well known, both have written insightful pieces on religion and the place religious thought has or should have in contemporary societies, its connection with morals, art, and individuals.

The first quotation above shows that, as early as 1884, James overtly distinguished between moralism and religion. However, not only did he draw this distinction but he did something more radical in the Introduction to Henry James Senior's book *Literary Remains*, where he pointed out that moralism and religion not only disagree but also oppose each other. In James's metaphor, one must die for the other to live meaningfully. This idea is at the core of my interpretation of the great American philosopher's work.

Also at the core of my view is the role of the individual in religion, i.e. if religion centers either on religious experiences or on doctrines and rites. One of the first authors to stress the importance of James's individualism was Josiah Royce, who writes in *The Sources of Religious Insight*:

James insists that the sources [of religious insight] are mainly from within the individual and are only incidentally social. A religious discovery has in common with a poetic creation that fact that the religious genius, like the artist, sees his vision, and produces his spiritual miracle, in solitude (ROYCE, 1940 [1912]: 63).

This precious paragraph by Royce emphasizes something that Rorty's interpretation makes a truism of neopragmatism: within its philosophy of religion James's aesthetication and/or privatization has played a significant role. Solitude and art, then, seem to be the keys to understand the Jamesian view of religion. Perhaps one of the most radical passages of James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* confirms this presumption:

The pivot round which the religious life, as we have traced it... is the interest of the individual in his private personal destiny. Religion, in short, is

a monumental chapter in the history of human egotism. The gods believed in—whether by crude savages or by men disciplined intellectually—agree with each other in recognizing personal calls. Religious thought is carried on in terms of personality, this being, in the world of religion, the one fundamental fact. Today, quite as much as at any previous age, the religious individual tells you that the divine meets him on the basis of his personal concerns (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 472).

In the battlefield of classical pragmatism, James and Royce explicitly disagree on the nature of the religious experience. While the former thinks that the *locus* of religion is within the individual, the latter conceives of the communal aspect as the center of religion. Recently, Rorty has fervently celebrated James's "privatization" of religion, sustaining that it, as art, should be regarded as a particular or private project. However, Rorty's James is not a crystalline but a bifrontal one, oscillating between what Rorty presents as *good* human endeavors and *bad* supernatural anxieties.

Within this framework, the purpose of this paper is to defend the idea that Rorty's view on James does not accurately interpret the scope of the sacred within James's thought. The core of my criticism is that James sustains self-surrender as a necessary condition for his conception of religion, while Rorty has an assertive conception of the self. Thus, my conception of James as well as Rorty's turn around the sacred, the artistic and the moral.

To carry out this task I present my arguments in five sections: in the first, I briefly present my conception of James's philosophy of religion as bifrontal; in the second, I stress the bifrontal character of Rorty's James; in the third I present my own version of James's conception of religion, which I call James's Lutheranism; in the fourth, I show how James's Lutheranism collides with Rorty's perspective, despite some apparent similarities; finally, in the last section, I describe how James deals with the notion of the sacred attempting to depict how Rorty's interpretation does not cohere with it.

1. The Bifrontal James I

Prometheanism is the label used by some authors to describe James's philosophy. According to my knowledge, Charles Morris was the first to refer to James's philosophy as a Promethean one.² John McDermott also describes James's self as a Promethean one (MCDERMOTT, 1982: xiv). Following McDermott, Richard Gale uses the same term in *The Divided Self of William James*. Gale's thesis is that two aspects of James's thought, Promethean pragmatism and anti-Promethean mysticism, are in conflict:

Whereas his Promethean self wants to ride herd on objects so as to control them for his own ends, his mystical self wants to become unified with them by entering into their inner conscious life so as to become unified with them, though not in a way that involves complete numerical identity, for James always favoured pluralistic mysticism [...]. (GALE, 2007 [1999]: 14)

2 MORRIS 1970: 11, quoted in GALE, 2007 [1999]: 6.

The essential idea behind these interpretations is that the key to understand James's philosophy is his conception of an unfinished universe where the subject decisively participates in the construction of the world. Under these perspectives, then, will is a central focal point of James. It is in Jamesian paragraphs like the following which McDermott and Gale stress as decisive:

Inaction also often counts as action. In many issues the inertia of one member will impede the success of the whole as much as his opposition will. To refuse, e.g., to testify against villainy, is practically to help it to prevail (JAMES, 1977 [1911]: 739).

Both McDermott's and Gale's interpretations point out something important regarding James's views: the pragmatist aspect of his philosophy and the conception that the individual subject is a relevant part—and not a mere mirror—in the construction of knowledge. However, Gale stresses the limits of James's view sustaining that within his philosophy there is a tension between Promethean pragmatism and anti-Promethean mysticism. Though my own analysis tends to agree in general with Gale's views, they differ on an important point: the tension that he describes as one between morals and religion, is for me a tension within religion. Thus, in my view, there exists a tension between Prometheanism and anti-Prometheanism within James's philosophy of religion. Why is this distinction so important? Because it explains why James's view on religion has many faces.

One of these faces relates to the different commitments that James's *The Will to Believe* and James's *Varieties* have: while the first rests on the action of individuals that help to create a phenomenon (love and God are James's examples)—regardless of this being correct or not—the *Varieties* is grounded on the idea of self-surrender, which I will make reference to below. If my interpretation is correct, *The Will to Believe* guides us towards an ethics of beliefs—to let our passions choose between options when our decision cannot be made on rational grounds—while the *Varieties* does not guide us towards an ethics but to the prevalence of theism. In *The Will to Believe* the focus is on the individual and the possibility to justify their religious beliefs; meanwhile, the nucleus of the *Varieties* is the negation of the individual through a specific method, namely self-surrender. Thus, my bifrontal James is one that oscillates between individualism and self-surrender.

Then, we encounter two different projects in *The Will to Believe* and in the *Varieties*. The first addresses to justify an individual's religious beliefs and sets the individual's action—justification—as the central task from which an ethics of belief arises to justify to which extent I can support my beliefs; the second relates with an *exhausted* self that can act only with divine aid. The question is the following: why—according to my proposal—is the project of the *Varieties* more fundamental than that of *The Will to Believe*? There are two possible answers to this question: first, that the *Varieties* is more fundamental because it acknowledges an essential feature of a religion: the existence of a divinity—in James's terms—and this thesis should prevail over the idea of justification of this divinity. In other words, the nucleus of the *Varieties*—the phenomenology of souls—fits James's fideism. Second, that the *Varieties* depicts an essential topic of James's philosophy

of religion, namely his *morbid* side, i.e. the existence of sick souls.³ Taking James's philosophy of religion as a whole, without this morbid side, entails putting aside a vital aspect of his thought.

2. The Bifrontal James II. Rorty on James and Religion

It is well known that Rorty's philosophy has played a fundamental role in different theoretical agendas. Firstly, he has sparked off an internal debate within analytical philosophy, radicalizing the views of central figures of this tradition such as Quine and Sellars. Secondly, he served a key role in promoting dialogue with other philosophical perspectives, especially continental philosophy; thirdly, he has rescued pragmatism—American aboriginal philosophy—as a way to renew philosophy, attempting to give it a social-cultural scope. All those endeavors have entailed passionate discussions, from Rorty's belonging (or not) to analytical tradition to the usual question of his view on classical American pragmatists, especially James and Dewey.

Unsurprisingly, discussions on Rorty's dealing with religion are also very passionate. He has written some mature works on this issue: (1994) "Religion as Conversation-Stopper", (2006 [1996]) "Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility and Romance", (1998) "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism", and (2003) "Religion in Public Sphere." The second one is particularly relevant to the present article since it deals specifically with James's philosophy of religion. Meanwhile, "Religion in Public Sphere" is also important because here Rorty explicitly changes some of his previous views on the topic.

In "Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility and Romance," the problem is not religion *per se* but religion associated with foundationalism:

Foundationalism is an epistemological view which can be adopted by those who suspend judgment on the realist's claim that reality has an intrinsic nature. A foundationalist needs only claim that every belief occupies a place in a natural, transcultural, transhistorical order of reasons — an order which eventually leads the inquirer back to one or another "ultimate source of evidence." Different foundationalists offer different candidates for such sources: for example, Scripture, tradition, clear and distinct ideas, sense-experience, and common sense. Pragmatists object to foundationalism for the same reasons they object to realism. They think that the question of whether my inquiries trace a natural order of reasons or merely respond to the demands for justification prevalent in my culture is, like the question

3 Gale points out this in the following paragraph: "When James was in his healthy Promethean frame of mind he tingled all over at the thought that we are engaged in a Texas Death Match with evil, without any assurance of possibility of victory. This possibility forms the basis of his religion of meliorism. But there is a morbid side to James's nature, a *really* morbid side, that "can't get no satisfaction" from the sort of religion that his pragmatism legitimates. In order to "help him make it through the night" he needs a mystically based religion, which gives him a sense of absolute safety and peace that comes through union with an encompassing spiritual reality." (GALE, 2007 [1999]: 16). Gerald Myers sustains something similar: "what often marks the religious experience, James concluded in *Varieties* is a regeneration achieved not through moral exertion but through a kind of self-surrender or relaxation of the will." (MYERS, 1986: 472).

whether the physical world is found or made, one to which the answer can make no practical difference (RORTY, 2006: 87).

As it is the case in other fields of philosophy, Rorty thinks that pragmatism can be useful in order to present a religion without the shortcomings of foundationalism. In other words: foundationalism—to look for the “ultimate source of evidence”—is the problem, and not religion. Thus, what elements does Rorty find within classical pragmatism in order to make religion *useful*? In his mature works he defends several theses about religion. For the purposes of this work, one of the main Rortyan ideas is the contraposition between individual and social projects. In “Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism,” for example, he writes:

Natural science is a paradigmatic project of social cooperation: the project of improving man's state by taking account of every possible observation and experimental result in order to facilitate the making of predictions that will come true. Law is another such paradigm. *Romantic art, by contrast, is a paradigmatic project of individual self-development. Religion, if it can be disconnected from both science and morals — from the attempt to predict the consequences of our actions and the attempt to rank human needs— may be another such paradigm* (RORTY, 2010 [1998]: 28, my italics).

Thus, religion unbound by morals and science is a potential source of personal growth. In a Rortyan world, therefore, the public would be equivalent to science and morals, and the private to the artistic/religious. It is in “Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility and Romance,” where this distinction between the public and the private is seen as a pragmatist Jamesian issue:

The underlying strategy of James's utilitarian pragmatist philosophy of religion is to *privatize* religion. This privatization allows him to construe the supposed tension between science and religion as the illusion of opposition between cooperative endeavours and private projects (RORTY, 2006: 85).

In other words, Jamesian pragmatism *crystallizes* ideas that have Romantic and Nietzschean antecedents, i.e. individual projects include the quest for the *own* religion independently of the social bounds we have inherited, and this entails, in Rorty's view, polytheism: “The substitution of poetry for religion as a source of ideals, a movement that began with the Romantics, seems to me usefully described as a return to polytheism” (Rorty (2010 [1998]): 22).⁴

This Rortyan view of polytheism is, unambiguously, a very particular one. It does not imply the actual existence of many Gods but the secular idea that there are conflicting and incommensurable values in the private sphere. In Rorty's interpretation, William James would play a vital role regarding religious experience

4 Amos Funkenstein writes in the same direction: “Except for William James (and perhaps Nietzsche), no other modern Western philosopher that I know of dared to defend a patently polytheistic creed; and needless to say, no such defence would be conceivable within the medieval horizon either” (FUNKENSTEIN, 1994: 99).

through the idea of the “privatization” of religious impulses. Within this project the fundamental idea is on the one hand, that morals and religion entail two different—and sometimes incompatible—endeavors; and, on the other hand, that religion is confined to the private sphere.

Durkheim and Charles Taylor, before and after Rorty respectively, have interpreted James in a similar way. James would prefigure, in terms of Taylor, a religion detached from social ties. In Taylor’s interpretation, James carried the Reformation’s individualism to the extreme, by conceiving a post-Durkheimian interpretation of religion (that is, one extricated from its communal aspect) which sounds convincing for numerous contemporary individuals.⁵ In other words: they agree in presenting James’s views of religion as related to the intimacy of the sacred.

The notion of sacred is at stake here. While this notion has a complex history and several meanings, Rorty’s James reduces the sacred to a matter of private endeavors, thus becoming a champion of individualism and liberalism. I will refer to this issue later.

I would like to finish this section with two remarks: first, that to this James, Rorty opposes another one. Put differently: this is not the only James since—in Rorty’s interpretation—the great pragmatist betrays his better instincts by succumbing to the temptation of supernaturalism. As a result, James’s shortcomings turn around the idea that there is something beyond human beings which religion has contact with. In Rorty’s terms:

For that definition associates religion with the conviction that a power not ourselves will do unimaginably vast good rather than with the hope that we ourselves will do such good (RORTY, 2006: 96).

Thus, there exists for Rorty a bifrontal James, i.e. one James who in the correct path splits moral and religious experiences as well as privatizes religion, while the other James is still overwhelmed by supernatural theism. Rorty’s interpretation, then, undoubtedly depends on the possibility of successfully separating the James of privatization from the James of supernaturalism.

A second remark has to do with a change in Rorty’s view. In opposition to his previous attempt to dissociate religion from morals, he argues that religion can be helpful as a way to fight against injustice in the world. In his words:

We recognize that the disappearance of ecclesiastical institutions would leave a gap in the lives of religious believers, for they will no longer have a sense of being part of a great and powerful institution. But that gap will be filled, we like to think, by an increased sense of participation in the advance of humanity — theists and atheists together, shoulder to shoulder — toward the fulfillment of social ideals (2010 [2003]: 457).

Although vague and imprecise, a view is presented in “Religion in Public Square” which is very different from that in “Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism”: while the former attempts to tie religion with social ideals (morals is necessarily included here), the latter is grounded on the idea that religion and moral should

5 DURKHEIM, 1955 [1915]; TAYLOR, 2003.

be clearly dissociated. Thus, my objection to Rorty is that there are two different positions in his philosophy about the relationship between religion, morals, and art. Sometimes he favors an assimilation of religion and art while other times he bends towards the assimilation of religion and morals.

3. James's Lutheranism⁶

It is well known that classical American pragmatism is an estimable source to understand religion as an inescapable human endeavor. Despite logical divergences among the approaches of classical figures, they share a primeval interest in religion. Charles Sanders Peirce, for example, gave religion a central role in his philosophy, especially through his conception of evolutionary love; Josiah Royce linked religion and morality in an attempt to recover the vitality of the Kantian tradition. Finally, John Dewey fought "militant atheism" through a view that could be called religious naturalism. As part of the core of this movement, William James's philosophy has religion as a fundamental issue, too.

Regarding James, David Zehnder begins an interesting article on his conception of religion with the following words:

In his famous *Varieties of Religious Experience*, the American philosopher and psychologist William James offers a rather secularized version of Protestant Reformation central insight: a person is justified by faith apart from moral achievement (ZEHNDER, (2010): 301).

Zehnder accurately points out one of James's central ideas: that morality and religion are dimensions which respond to different human necessities. In James's terms:

It was the extremer cases that I had in mind a little while ago when I said that personal religion, even without theology or ritual, would prove to embody some elements that morality pure and simple does not contain (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 22).

But there is yet another element, namely that James's conception focuses not only on the idea that religion shows us a dimension that morality cannot reach but also on religious experiences as sometimes the result of an anti-moralistic method:

Under these circumstances the way to success, as vouched for by innumerable authentic personal narrations, is by an anti-moralistic method, by the "surrender" of which I spoke in my second lecture. *Passivity, not activity; relaxation, not intentness, should be now the rule* (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 110, my italics).

There are two Jamesian elements that one can point out from this paragraph: *first, that morality never cures as religion does*. This is a constant view of James: even the best of us suffers for their weakness and their vitality is like a shadow destined to

6 This section is an abridged version of a paper "William James's Lutheranism" that is under evaluation.

die; *second, that sometimes it is passivity and not activity the key to solve our spiritual problems.* For my purposes in this paper one point to highlight is that this passivity or *quietism* is explicitly connected with Luther's view of religion:

On the whole, one is struck by a psychological similarity between the mind-cure movement and the Lutheran and Wesleyan movements. To the believer in moralism and works, with his anxious query, "What shall I do to be saved?" Luther and Wesley replied: "You are saved now, if you would but believe it" (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 107-8).

The relevant focuses in question are two: first, that James interprets Luther *à la Troeltsch*, i.e. attributing *quietism* to his conception of religion; second, that James uses this interpretation to ground his own position on religion.

It is well-known that three types of religious mentalities are presented in James's *Varieties*: the healthy one, the sick soul and the twice-born. Though radically different, these mentalities share a feature: they are intelligible only in terms of faith (or by justification by faith) and not of justification by works (in Lutheran terms). This is the core of my interpretation of James and the reason why I emphasize the consequences of Lutheranism as a central aspect of James's thought.

For James, healthy souls are those that cannot perceive evil in the world. Moreover, in extreme cases "in some individuals optimism may become quasi-pathological" (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 83). What relationship does it bear with Lutheranism? They are not linked at a doctrinal level but through justification by faith, the mechanism proposed by Luther as fundamental. Put differently, the core of this mechanism is not action but our acceptance of God's grace. In James's terms: "It is but giving your little private convulsive self a rest, and finding that a greater Self is there" (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 111). This giving up is overtly associated with Lutheran theology:

Give up the feeling of responsibility, let go your hold, resign the care of your destiny to higher powers, be genuinely indifferent as to what becomes of it all, and you will find not only that you gain a perfect inward relief, but often also, in addition, the particular goods you sincerely thought you were renouncing. This is the salvation through self despair, the dying to be truly born, of Lutheran theology, the passage into nothing of which Jacob Behmen writes (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 110).

This mentality is of fundamental importance for the purpose of this article as it shows us one crucial issue: what is at stake is not the content of religious doctrines but the mechanism that allows religious experience to occur. This mechanism is based on the *anti-moralistic, Lutheran* method of the surrender of the self.

Sick souls, on the other hand, are very sensitive to evil in the world, perception which is acutely felt, as pointed out by James:

Not the conception or intellectual perception of evil, but the grisly blood-freezing heart-palsying sensation of it close upon one, and no other conception or sensation able to live for a moment in its presence (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 162).

James sustains that this variety of religious experience is richer than the first one in the sense that it allows us to comprehend more features of the world. This mentality is not only presented as compatible with Luther's thought but James explicitly recurs to Luther to describe it. More specifically, James maintains that Protestant theology perfectly fits this kind of religious temperament:

It is needless to remind you once more of the admirable congruity of Protestant theology with the structure of the mind as shown in such experiences. In the extreme of melancholy the self that consciously is can do absolutely nothing. It is completely bankrupt and without resource, and no works it can accomplish will avail. Redemption from such subjective conditions must be a free gift or nothing, and grace through Christ's accomplished sacrifice is such a gift (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 244).

After this statement relating Protestant theology with sick souls James quotes a long paragraph from Luther's *Commentary on the Galatians* concluding with the following words:

That is, the more literally lost you are, the more literally you are the very being whom Christ's sacrifice has already saved. Nothing in Catholic theology, I imagine, has ever spoken to sick souls as straight as this message from Luther's personal experience (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 246).

From a theological perspective the message in this paragraph is of remarkable importance. However, what is relevant to the purposes of this paper is not a theological but a methodological issue, namely that James shows us once more that religious experiences are grounded on an anti-moralistic method, i.e. giving up of the self and trust in the divinity.

The last mentality presented by James in the *Varieties* is the twice-born. It is the most complete of all the religious souls because they have seen good and evil, or in other words both sides of the abyss and have recovered through a process that James calls redemption:

The process is one of redemption, not of mere reversion to natural health, and the sufferer, when saved, is saved by what seems to him a second birth, a deeper kind of conscious being than he could enjoy before (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 157).

When James deals with these souls he does not recur to Luther's works. However, one can draw an analogy since he uses the same anti-moralistic Lutheran method to explain the way these souls should be conceived of:

It may come gradually, or it may occur abruptly; it may come through altered feelings or through altered powers of action; or it may come through new intellectual insights, or through experiences which we shall later have to designate as 'mystical.' However it comes, it brings a characteristic sort of relief; and never such extreme relief as when it is cast into the religious mould. Happiness! Happiness! Religion is only one of the

ways in which men gain that gift. Easily, permanently, and successfully, it often transforms the most intolerable misery into the profoundest and most enduring happiness (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 175).

Thus, for twice-born as well as for healthy and sick souls the most important feature is their ability to find a vital sense putting themselves aside and resting in a greater Self.

I have just depicted the main features of James's religious mentalities and shown how they share a crucial aspect, namely the *split between morality and religion*.⁷ Then, all religious experience is radically different from moral experience. I have named this James's Lutheranism because the American philosopher grounded this conception on Luther's thought, particularly on the method of the surrender of the self.

Regarding *belief* and *faith* James takes another fundamental step in the *Varieties*, i.e. he openly separates the intellectual content of faith from *having* faith. Unsurprisingly, James recurs to Luther to ground his position:

Faith that Christ has genuinely done his work was part of what Luther meant by faith, which so far is faith in a fact intellectually conceived of. But this is only a part of Luther's faith, the other part being far more vital. This other part is something not intellectual but immediate and intuitive, the assurance, namely that I, this individual I, just as I stand, without one plea, etc., am saved now and forever (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 246).

James distinguishes between faith and the content of faith. This step is central since it allows setting the core of religious experience within the individual. James's Lutheranism consists in taking one of Luther's basic insights, namely *the fact of believing that one is saved* as a fundamental ground of religion, disregarding doctrines and rites.

7 Many interpreters of James's philosophy do not agree with the sharp split between morals and religion that I am proposing. Michael Slater, for example, sustains the following when examining the *Varieties*: "The third and final criterion, *moral helpfulness*, denotes the values of a belief or experience for the moral life, and in the context of James's studies of religious experience this may very well be the most important of the three. In particular, James thinks that it is the *good dispositions* (VRE, 24-26) produced by religious and mystical experience which provide us with the best indicators of their *truth*, though such dispositions are valuable in their own right on moral grounds." (SLATER, 2000: 122). Doug Anderson maintains a similar position: "The self-surrender or submission, ironically, leads to a rebirth. The converted soul feels empowered in ways that she or he had not previously experienced [...] the difference from the free power and agency felt by the healthy-minded is that the personal power now has a clearly self-transcendent source: a living ideal or power. The converted soul finds herself or himself living in a wider life where things can be seen more clearly." (ANDERSON 2003: 9). The point I want to stress is the following: I do not deny that the religious experience entails, in James's terms, moral *strenuousness*. However, this is an effect of religious belief and not its cause. Its cause lies in the method of self-surrender where all natural dispositions are denied and whose source is the divinity. In other words, James is following a Lutheran path where good deeds (morals) are consequences of beliefs (religion).

Summing up, I show two points in this section. First, that James's thought is influenced by Luther's. Second, that this Lutheranism is based on the split between morality and religion, on the one hand, and on the distinction between faith and the content of faith, on the other. Concerning the former, I think that I have provided relevant textual evidence from James's *Varieties* where he quotes or paraphrases Luther. Although it is true that James has based the *Varieties* in an abundant kind of sources, the point is that James is not only quoting or paraphrasing Luther's thought at random but he grounds *Varieties*' fundamental issues (split between morality and religion, the importance of faith for religion) based on Luther's texts.

Consequently, from a narrow perspective centered on his work, James's conception of religion can be considered as belonging to the Lutheran tradition and, as well as other philosophical receptions of Luther's work, it can be seen as an original philosophical appropriation of his thought.

4. James and Rorty

I have previously said that my interpretation of James's conception of religion seems to be partially congruent with Rorty's. This statement is grounded on the three features they seem to share: both highlight the vital role of James's individual in religion;

1. both depict James's sharp distinction between religion and morals;
2. both share the same spirit of James's antirepresentationalism, i.e. the idea that representations do not play a central role in religion.

Regarding the first feature, I have shown Rorty's James in section 2, and my interpretation of James in section 3. Both emphasize that, for James, individual experience is the *locus* of religion. I think that one can trace this Jamesian thesis back to different backgrounds: Nietzsche — as interpreted by Rorty — and Luther — as in my interpretation. They are related in the following ways: if one considers Luther's work as the beginning of modernity — as Hegel does — and as the beginning of one specific European tradition, it is possible to see Nietzschean and Jamesian ways as courses of Lutheranism. Thus, it is not a coincidence that Rorty's James and the James I am presenting cohere and agree. Nevertheless, there is a remarkable difference between them: while the James of the *Varieties* sets the *locus* of religion within a surrendering individual, Rorty stresses the importance of self-assertiveness in individuals. I will take up this line of argument in the following pages.

Concerning the second feature, I have shown Rorty's James in section 2, and my own interpretation of James in section 3. Both agree in showing that, for James, one must clearly distinguish between morals and religion. However, at a deeper level, they diverge on the reason why they look for this split. For James, morals could never be a substitute for religion because morality does not empower individuals as religion does empowerment, which is the consequence of a specific Jamesian method: the surrender of the self. Meanwhile, Rorty separates religion from morals trying to make the former be understood as a self-assertive individual's *private* project.

Regarding the third feature, what is at stake here is the scope of representationalism. James's antirepresentationalism is grounded on passages as the following:

When we survey the whole field of religion, we find a great variety in the thoughts that have prevailed there; but the feelings on the one hand and the conduct on the other are almost always the same, for Stoic, Christian, and Buddhist saints are practically indistinguishable in their lives. The theories which Religion generates, being thus variable, are secondary; *and if you wish to grasp her essence, you must look to the feelings and the conduct as being the more constant elements* (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 504, my emphasis).

Rorty would agree with James on this point. In other words, the relevant aspect of religion is not at a doctrinal level but at the level of feelings and the behavior derived from them.

5. James, Rorty and the Sacred

Up to now, we have seen that Rorty's James and my view share some superficial similarities since they agree on James's setting up of the *locus* of religion within the individual, on him making a sharp distinction between religion and morals and on his antirepresentationalist conception of religious experiences. There is, however, a central aspect emphasized by my interpretation, which is difficult to integrate with Rorty's: Jamesian self-surrender as a method to get religious experience. We have seen that James refers to Luther in the *Varieties*. However, it is in *A Pluralistic Universe* where the connection appears in its clearest form:

Luther was the first moralist who broke with any effectiveness through the crust of all this naturalistic self-sufficiency, thinking (and possibly he was right) that Saint Paul had done it already. Religious experience of the Lutheran type brings all our naturalistic standards to bankruptcy. You are strong only by being weak, it shows (JAMES, 1977 [1909]: 800).

James thinks that after Luther any kind of naturalism appears to be naive. The very self of religion is an exhausted self that can do nothing if unaided. Within this context a remarkable difference between Rorty and James arises, which is more radical than the one Rorty points out when interpreting James. Although James — like Rorty — sets up the *locus* of religion within the individual, he also emphasizes self-surrender as a central mechanism for religious mentalities, while Rorty has a completely *liberal* confidence in the individual.

My argument is the following: if my interpretation is correct and self-surrender is the central method of religious experiences in James's *Varieties*, then it is difficult to conceive of James as the champion of the privatization of religion. In other words: all the religious experiences in the *Varieties* are grounded on the method of self-surrender, so the action of the divinity is necessary in all of them, according to James. The self surrenders to something, and this something is the divinity. Thus, for James, all the religious mentalities of the *Varieties* offer self-surrendering individuals who really need a God. As a result, James's conception of religion cannot be seen

as postulating creative projects of individuals that disregard social ties, but as conceiving individuals that desperately need a divinity.⁸

On the other hand, for privatization we need *self-assertive* individuals who look for creative instruments that crystallize their selves. Thus, what Rorty has in mind with the privatization of religion is the idea of self-assertive individuals that look for contingent representations of their more basic habits/impulses in a purely human environment, a religion without God or beyond God.

It is true that Rorty overtly acknowledges the bifrontal character of James's conception of religion as I have shown before. This bifrontal character entails a James who does not fit Rorty's religious naturalism, i.e. Rorty's conception of romance. In his words:

The kind of religious faith which seems to me to lie behind the attractions of both utilitarianism and pragmatism is, instead, a faith in the future possibilities of mortal humans, a faith which is hard to distinguish from love for, and hope for, the human community. I shall call this fuzzy overlap of faith, hope, and love "romance." Romance, in this sense, may crystallize around a labor union as easily as around a congregation, around a novel as easily as around a sacrament, around a God as easily as around a child (RORTY, 2006: 96).

For my purposes, the crucial part of this paragraph says that religious faith is "[...] a faith in the future possibilities of mortal humans...", dissociating the ideas of transcendence, immortality and God from religion. Regarding James's philosophy of religion, Rorty's theoretical point is to split James's view in two parts and just take the one which is, in his view, the *pragmatist* part. The question is if that is coherently possible? I think it is not, because of the extremely different meaning they give to the concept of the sacred, which is a central one.

James's concept of the sacred inexorably needs a God, while Rorty's concept does not. For James, the sacred is always something we receive as a gift, while for Rorty it is something that we put in the world. There is passivity in religious experiences for James, in the sense that they always depend on the role of the divinity. If my interpretation is correct, this is owed to James's Lutheranism. "Redemption from such subjective conditions must be a free gift or nothing [...]" says James in the *Varieties*. On the contrary, for Rorty, religion always entails the creative activity of individuals. We *sacralize* something (or the individual sacralizes something) which makes life worth living.

8 One of the anonymous reviewers has pointed out that "[...] surrendering is itself an active deed, in a sense, an engagement with oneself and the way one sees the world." This would be true if James had maintained a naturalistic conception of religion because the individual himself would look for expression of himself. But this is not the case at least in the central part of the *Varieties*, i.e. in the parts where James depicts his phenomenology of religious souls. In other words, the core of the Jamesian method of self-surrender entails a view of the individual acting not by himself (i.e. by his natural dispositions) but *through* the divinity. Put differently: it is a requisite of the method of self-surrender that the believer can do nothing without divine aid. I would like to thank the referee for showing me this point.

The sacred, for James, is the relationship between man and his maker as this paragraph illustrates:

And although the favor of the God, as forfeited or gained, is still an essential feature of the story, and theology plays a vital part therein, yet the acts to which this sort of religion prompts are personal not ritual acts, the individual transacts the business by himself alone, and the ecclesiastical organization, with its priests and sacraments and other go-betweens, sinks to an altogether secondary place. The relation goes direct from heart to heart, from soul to soul, between man and his maker (JAMES, 1994 [1902]: 29).

Meanwhile, for Rorty, the sacred is a very secular Millian utopia

If we secular humanists have our way, the liberal democracies will eventually mutate into societies whose most sacred texts were written by John Stuart Mill. But there is a long way to go before that ideal is reached (RORTY, 2010 [2003]: 459)

In other words, James, on the one hand, puts the sacred in the relationship between man and God, but giving an essential role to the divinity, to the extent that there exists the idea of self-surrender for all the religious mentalities of the *Varieties*; on the other hand, Rorty conceives of the sacred as a hope in our future societies, disregarding notions of God, transcendence, and immortality. Summing up, it is in the consequences of Jamesian Lutheranism where we find the difference between James and Rorty regarding religion: the former proposes an intimacy of the sacred that always depends on individuals' self-surrender, while the latter looks for poetics of self-expression that always entails a creative quest by individuals.⁹

Conclusion

In the five sections of this article I have analyzed several issues, from James's and Rorty's bifrontal views to the scope of the sacred within their conceptions. The point to be highlighted is that it is impossible to coherently conceive of James's philosophy of religion as a privatization/aesthetication of religion, as Rorty does. In other words, Rorty does not take into account three aspects which are usually associated with religion: immortality, transcendence, and God. For James, God — the divinity — is a necessary condition for something to be called a religion. He would be against the deflationist idea that conceives of religion as a mere cultural phenomenon as Rorty intends to do. In other words: the sacred means different things for Rorty and James.

9 One of the anonymous reviewers asked me: "Could not a Jamesian pluralistic pragmatism accommodate both "an intimacy of the sacred" and "poetics of self-expression?" I think that James's antinaturalistic conception of religion rules out this possibility. The intimacy of the sacred refers to the cause of the religious experience for the believer, i.e. it refers to the very divinity. Meanwhile, the poetics of self-expression only the consequence of religious experience. Put differently: the poetics of self-expression implies one assertive election by the individual while the intimacy of the sacred implies resting of the self in the divinity and relaxation of the will. I thank the referee for showing me this point.

While the former attempts to transform religion into a private affair or in a way to fight social ills, James stresses the relation between the individual and his maker as the core of religion through the Lutheran notion of self-surrender.

References

ANDERSON, Doug. Respectability and the Wild Beast of the Desert: the Heart of James's Varieties. *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, University Park: Penn State University Press, vol. 17, n 1, p. 1-13, 2003.

DURKHEIM, Emile. *Pragmatism and Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 [1915].

FUNKENSTEIN, Amos. The Polytheism of William James. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, vol. 55, n 1, p. 99-111, 1994.

GALE, Richard. *The Divided Self of William James*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007.

JAMES, Williams. *The Writings of William James*. Edited and with an Introduction by John McDermott. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977[1967].

_____. *The Works of William James*. Introduction by John McDermott. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

MYERS, Gerald. *William James: His life and thought*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

MORRIS, Charles. *The Pragmatic Movement in American Philosophy*. New York: George Braziller, 1970.

RORTY, Richard. Religion as Conversation-Stopper. *Philosophy and Social Hope*. Boston: Penguin, 2000 [1994].

_____. Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility and Romance. *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy*, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, vol. 17, n. 2, p. 121-140, 1996. Available at: <http://pages.uoregon.edu/koopman/courses_readings/rorty_james.pdf> Cambridge: Companions Online©Cambridge University Press, 2006.

_____. Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism. *The Revival of Pragmatism*. Edited by Morris Dickstein. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.

_____. Religion in the Public Square: A reconsideration. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 31, 1, p. 141-149, 2003. *The Rorty Reader*. Voparil and Bernstein editors. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

ROYCE, Josiah. *The Sources of Religious Insight*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940 [1912].

SLATER, Michael. Metaphysical Intimacy and the Moral Life: The ethical project of the varieties of religious experience. *Transactions of the Charles Peirce Society*, vol. 43, 1, p. 116-153, 2000.

TAYLOR, Charles. *Varieties of Religion Today: William James's Revisited*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

ZEHNDER, David. The Hermeneutical Keys to William James's Philosophy of Religion: Protestant impulses, vital belief. *Forum Philosophicum International Journal for Philosophy*, vol. 15, n 2, p. 301-16, 2010.

Endereço / Address

Claudio Marcelo Viale
Instituto de Humanidades (IDH)
Pabellón Agustín Tosco
Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades
Universidad Nacional de Córdoba
5009
Córdoba, Argentina

Data de recebimento: 30-07-2013

Data de aprovação: 21-09-2013

